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RACE, SCIENCE, AND THE LEGITIMIZATION OF WHITE SUPREMACY IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1902–1940*

By Paul Rich

Ideas of race in South African history have usually been seen in the context of the rise of white nationalism and apartheid. This has led to a focus upon the internal dynamics of Afrikaner political mobilization organized by such bodies as the Dutch Reformed Churches, the Broederbond, and the National Party.¹ More recently scholars have begun to examine the role of British racial ideas in South African politics. Leonard Thompson has shown in a recent study of the role of historical mythology in the development of apartheid ideology that some British notions of social Darwinism and race fitness were taken up in South Africa by both English- and Afrikaans-speaking race ideologues in the early years of the twentieth century.² Thompson's study did not pursue in any detailed manner the influence of British and United States racial ideology on the emergence of white South African racism, which was mainly seen through the development of Afrikaner nationalist consciousness.

Radical scholars have also begun to stress the importance of ideas generated in the imperial metropolis seeping through into South African political debate before and after Union in 1910. In the 1970s Martin Legassick began a reassessment of the British ideological impact at the time of the reconstruction in the Transvaal after the Anglo-Boer War. Legassick emphasized the role of class rather than ethnic divisions in white politics as an ideology of segregation began to be mobilized in defense of white settler power. He saw racial ideas as important in transcending Afrikaner-British divisions, since they underpinned a segregationist ideology that was an instrument of white mining interests bent on mobilizing cheap black labor.³ In a series of unpublished seminar papers, Legassick's work was significant for directing attention to the role of English race theorists in systematizing a doctrine of racial segregation in order to rationalize a policy of perpetuating pre-capitalist economies in the African reserves. The research was strongly influenced by the sociological model of Harold Wolpe that explained the transition from segregation to apartheid in South Africa as a result

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¹See, for example, W.H. Vatcher, *White Laager: The Rise of Afrikaner Nationalism*, (London, 1965); T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Berkeley, 1979); Dan O'Meara, *Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948* (Johannesburg, 1983).

²Leonard Thompson, *The Political Mythology of Apartheid* (New Haven, 1986); see also Christopher Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past* (Cape Town, 1988).

³Martin Legassick, "The Making of South African 'Native Policy,' 1903-1923: The Origins of Segregation," London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies (mimeo), 1972; "British Hegemony and the Origins of Segregation, 1900-1914," London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies (mimeo), 1973.

of the collapse of the subsistence base of the reserves. Migrant labor was seen as undermining the rural peasant economy that had, in its initial phases, artificially subsidized African wage rates in the urban areas.⁴

More recently, Saul Dubow has reassessed this explanation for segregation by the revisionist school, pointing out that some of the English-speaking apologists for segregation in the early years of this century were not so much concerned with cheap African labor migrating from the reserves but with more general issues of social discipline and social control over the African work force.⁵ Segregation in this instance appears more as an extension of Victorian fears of the "dangerous classes." The ideology was constructed to maintain social order as well as social and moral hygiene, which became a powerful metaphorical image in the drive for urban segregation in South Africa in the early twentieth century.⁶ It was also evident from an analysis of the role of the administrative class in the South African state, such as the Native Affairs Department, that there was an independent bureaucratic rationale for segregation in terms of a desire to consolidate the department's control through such legislation as the 1927 Native Administration Act.⁷ It is thus clearly inadequate to see segregationist ideology as the mere rationalization of capitalist class interests in South Africa's industrializing society.

These efforts at refining historical knowledge on the nature and trajectory of South African segregationist ideology indicate that it has to be taken far more seriously in its impact on South African political economy than many historians of an earlier liberal generation have imagined. Segregation was not simply the atavistic product of a pre-industrial frontier but was part of a wider pattern of modernization of South African society. To this extent, segregation can be seen, as John Cell has pointed out, as an extremely adaptive and protean ideology that focused a drive towards the "highest stage of white supremacy."⁸ As part of this drive, there was a clear desire to incorporate modern and "scientific" modes of discourse within the segregationist lexicon. The burden of this paper is to show how this was for a period an important part of the South African debate on race before the emergence of apartheid. It was superseded in the 1930s by a language that was influenced by an anthropology emphasizing cultural rather than racial differences.

⁴Harold Wolpe, "Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power in South Africa: From Segregation To Apartheid," *Economy and Society*, XIV (1972), 425-56.

⁵Saul Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919-36* (London, 1989), 24.

⁶M. Swanson, "The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-1909," *Journal of African History*, XV111, 3 (1977).

⁷Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, 77-127; "Holding a Just Balance Between White and Black: The Native Affairs Department in South Africa, 1920-33," *Journal of Southern African Studies* XI, 2 (1986).

⁸John W. Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (Cambridge, 1982).

Race and the Drive for "Scientific" Segregation

The theorists involved in the South African debate on segregation after the Anglo-Boer War were small inter-locking groups of political activists, racist doctrinaires, and amateur anthropologists, some of whom came from missionary backgrounds. Much of their reading was second-hand and, until the rise of anthropological research in the 1920s and 1930s, there was little attempt to back up propositions with systematic evidence. Argument often fell back upon well-worn stereotypes, though this did not preclude a strong determination among many of them to try and develop a "scientific" vocabulary to justify segregation.

The appeal of science lay in the rapidly growing connections in the international scientific community by the early twentieth century. Scientific discourses began rapidly penetrating such new subject areas as geography, anthropology, and psychology at this time. The prominent missionary role in the discussion of race issues was beginning to be undermined by a new secular interest from ostensibly neutral "experts" who appeared to be gaining allies from within a new professional intelligentsia in efforts to influence policy at the level of the state. The newer scientific discourse in many cases ended up perpetuating older conceptions of African society inherited from nineteenth-century travellers and missionaries in a new guise. The scientific popularizers of race looked for tendencies described by Philip Curtin as "diversificationism" that emphasized aspects of human difference rather than similarity. Behind much of their thinking was the assumption that there was some form of order and hierarchy in human races in which the white, Anglo-Saxon race occupied the topmost position.⁹

Political debate in South Africa raged as elsewhere on the possible future outcome of the relationship forged by colonial conquest between blacks and whites. C.T. Loram, a prominent educationalist from Natal, identified three schools of thought on the issue: "repressionists," "equalists," and "segregationists." The latter Loram saw as holding the middle ground between the other two.¹⁰ "Scientific" evidence to buttress the arguments of the segregationists was open-ended, since it could be used to support a variety of predictions regarding the future. Few Social Darwinists in South Africa held that Africans would completely die out in the face of advancing white colonial settlement, in contrast to many exponents of this view in the U.S. at this time.¹¹ The demographic balance in South Africa in which whites numbered some one million in the 1904 census compared to three and a half million Africans ensured that even the most ardent of white racists had to accept the permanence of African occupation in a "white man's country." Territorial segregationist ideology, as in the popular novel of the Milner Kindergarten member John Buchan, *Prester John* (1910), tended to be perceived in the early twentieth century in terms of different geographical regions of white and black land settlement. Cities and urban areas and the temperate

⁹ Philip Curtin, *The Image of Africa* (Madison, 1964), 429-31.

¹⁰ C.T. Loram, *The Education of the South African Native*, (London, 1927), 17-25.

¹¹ John S. Haller, *Outcasts From Evolution: Scientific Attitudes to Racial Inferiority, 1859-1900* (New York 1975), 209. One South African theorist of race, though, continued to believe as late as the 1890s that the "aborigines" of the continent would die out in the face of "Caucasian" advance. See F. S. Tatham, *The Race Conflict in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, 1894).

high veld regions were considered the abodes of whites, while the low veld areas and regions of dense African peasant settlement such as Transkei and Zululand were the terrain of Africans.¹² It was hoped that in time the rural peasant economies would undergo an internal evolutionary adaptation toward the white model of agriculture.

From the middle 1880s, a progressive erosion occurred in the Cape liberal impulse based on a civilizing ideal of progressively accommodating educated Africans into a single colonial society. In 1897 the liberal scholar and politician from Britain, James Bryce, wrote pessimistically in *Impressions of South Africa* that the "two races" of white and black in South Africa were "separated by the repulsion of physical differences" and would have "no social intercourse, no mixture of blood, but will each form, a nation by itself for all purposes save those of industry and perhaps of politics."¹³ Bryce's observations indicated that even in the metropolitan heartland of the Victorian liberal tradition, there were growing doubts on the capacity for white and blacks to mix in a common society.¹⁴ They provided a fillip for the development of segregationism in South Africa over the following decades.

The attack on the Cape *mission civilisatrice* developed in the years after the Anglo-Boer War during a period of reconstruction in the Transvaal under the British colonial administration of Lord Milner. A number of scholars have pointed to the long-term importance of the South African Native Affairs Commission of 1903-1905 under the secretary of native affairs in the Transvaal, Sir Godfrey Lagden. Though the Commission never specifically referred to "segregation" as such, it certainly envisaged the separate holding of land by whites and Africans.¹⁵ Legassick has argued that the Commission represented more a synthesis of local ideas current in South Africa rather than those from the British metropolis.¹⁶ This was due in part to the fact that opinion in colonial circles in Whitehall was unclear over the long-term direction of "native policy." There was a general preference for preserving indigenous African institutions in the belief that Africans did not like being pressurized into accepting too hasty a pace of change. But what theorizing there was tended to be of an academic kind that had little direct relationship to the actual situation on the ground in Africa.¹⁷

Some of the representatives of the British official mind also reflected this political skepticism. Lagden began to doubt as early as 1903 whether the Commission's work would lead to clear policies and considered that "we can do little

¹²Paul B. Rich, "Milnerism and a Ripping Yarn: Transvaal Land Settlement and John Buchan's Novel *Prester John*, 1901-1910," in Belinda Bozzoli, ed., *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal* (Johannesburg, 1983), 412-33.

¹³James Bryce, *Impressions of South Africa* (London, 1899), 465.

¹⁴Paul B. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics*, (Cambridge, 1986), 15-26.

¹⁵Cell, *Highest Stage*, 210-13.

¹⁶Legassick "British Hegemony," 3.

¹⁷Ronald Hyam, *Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office* (London, 1968), 371-72.

more than generalise our conclusions."¹⁸ Towards the end of his stay as secretary of native affairs he felt increasingly vulnerable to attacks from white racial extremists in the Johannesburg press at a time of "black peril" scares relating to the large black servant population in the city. He wanted the "native question" to be debated in as "non-political" a manner as possible.¹⁹

The South African Native Affairs Commission was in many respects part of a holding operation by the colonial establishment in the Transvaal against pressures for a more overtly racist interpretation of South African politics that frequently resorted to a pseudo-scientific Darwinism. The *Transvaal Leader*, for instance, urged in the wake of the "disgraceful scenes" in the 1904 Cape elections, where white candidates had been "begging and manoeuvring for the votes of black men" that:

we can say with scientific certainty that the process of evolution must be so prolonged as to deprive any speculations based on it of present political interest or importance, even were the negro or negroid races on an ethnological equality with the people of Aryan or Caucasian descent. That, however, is a position that no one yet maintains. The very formation of the negro skull is so antagonistic to the theory, recalling as it does the Neanderthal head, which is admittedly a member of the European race which existed many thousands of years before the dawn of history.²⁰

This racism was of an impressionistic variety which sought authoritative backing from fewer "scientific" experts compared to that of the United States during the same period. The colonial establishment was concerned to try and lead white political opinion and reduce the influence of the racial extremists, who threatened to stir up feelings at a time when there were mounting demands for self-government. Lagden saw the arrival of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in South Africa for its 1905 annual meeting as an important opportunity for expert backing for a moderate position on the "native question." He declined an invitation to give a paper to the gathering himself, but asked Howard Pim to address it. He assisted Pim in visiting Basutoland (Lesotho) as part of his research for the paper, as this appeared a working model of the

¹⁸Godfrey Lagden Papers, Rhodes House Library, Oxford, A951/A7 Diary entry for 16 March 1903. In a memorandum on the SANAC report, Lagden felt that it was "desirable to move steadily and quietly so as to avoid any unnecessary disturbance of the native mind." He opposed the multiplications of African land holdings "scattered throughout the white population and owning the land of the country equally with them," since this would "accentuate feelings of race prejudice and animosity with unhappy results," Archives of the Transvaal Secretary of Native Affairs, Transvaal Archives Depot, Pretoria, SNA 265, *Memorandum by the Commissioner for Native Affairs upon the Report of South African Native Affairs Commission in its Relation to the Transvaal, 1905*, 1-4.

¹⁹Diary entry for 30 January 1905.

²⁰*The Transvaal Leader*, October 19, 1904.

self-sufficient peasant reserve in southern Africa that was so favored by the segregationists.²¹

Pim had made a favorable impression on Lagden by interpreting the race issue in South Africa through a benevolent humanitarianism. While the race issue might be an "academic one" for the rest of the British empire, Pim had pointed out in a 1903 paper to the Transvaal Philosophical Society, in the South African context there was a need for an agreed policy on it. He warned against direct methods of forcing Africans out into the labor market and was interested in maintaining the reserve economies less as a means for promoting cheap migrant labor for the mines than as a mechanism of social control.²² He shared the view of James Bryce that black and white would be unable to live side by side, though he was concerned to pursue a humanitarian ideal through the logic of the free market. This meant championing the ideals of De Tocqueville in his work *Democracy in America*, for "if the Natives in this country work voluntarily as free men in the open market, we need not fear the degradation of the white man."²³ In 1905 Pim also urged a closer comparison between the situation in South Africa and that of the U.S. South for the apparently similar tendencies in both societies "must be due to racial difference of a fundamental nature, and for this reason must receive the closest attention and be treated with the greatest respect."²⁴ During this period liberal humanitarians internationally were not averse to trying to link a code of humanitarian ethics with what appeared to be self-evident race differences. It was only by the late 1920s and 1930s that a rejection of the whole notion of race differences would emerge.²⁵

There was already a feeling of despondency in some black political circles by the time that Lagden left South Africa at the end of 1905. The Cape paper *Izwi Labantu* complained that Lagden had "lost the sympathy of the intelligent native" for his opinions were "simply theories thrown out as capitalist kisses to bolster up a policy which as far as his conduct of Native Affairs goes has been discreditable to the country and the credit of the British government."²⁶ The black elite in the Cape felt increasingly betrayed by the British colonial administration in the Transvaal. They saw the Milner administration as failing to make a strong stand against the white settler interests on the Witwatersrand who

²¹J. Howard Pim Papers, Church of the Province Archives, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, G. Lagden to H. Pim 29 November 1903, 6 and 24 April 1905.

²²Howard Pim, *The Native Question in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1903).

²³Howard Pim, *The Native Problem in South Africa*, (Johannesburg, 1905), 11. "To think that we can civilise the native is an idle dream," Pim wrote, "He must civilise himself or die," 13. See also Howard Pim, *The Question of Race* (Johannesburg, 1906).

²⁴*The Native Problem in South Africa*.

²⁵John David Shingler, "Education and Political Order in South Africa, 1902-1961" (Ph.D thesis, Yale University, 1973), 17; in Britain, though, many aspects of the old racial typology survived well into the 1940s, Rich, *Race and Empire*, 117-19.

²⁶*Izwi Labantu*, March 20 1906. Some black papers had felt doubtful over Lagden's chairmanship of SANAC from the very beginning. "I do not think that the country will benefit under his chairmanship," wrote "a native." "He has not the training of a judge - a man who has studied impartially to perfection," *Koranta ea Becoana*, October 21 1903.

opposed the extension of the qualified Cape African franchise to the rest of South Africa.

This despondency grew in the following few years as there was mounting pressure for a "native policy" in South Africa with an "element of finality in it."²⁷ The attainment of Responsible Government in the Transvaal following the victory of the Het Volk Party of General Botha and General Smuts in 1907 provided a political focus for an attack upon the cautious trusteeship of the previous Milner administration. As the question of "Closer Union" in South Africa began to loom on the horizon, the issue of a coherent native policy for the new state increasingly permeated political debate.

This became evident with the founding of the Transvaal Native Affairs Society in 1908 "for the study and discussion of the South African native question, with a view to enunciating and advocating a liberal, consistent and practical Native policy throughout South Africa."²⁸ The Society soon proved less than liberal in refusing to admit Africans as members. It tended to represent English-speaking commercial and professional interests on the Witwatersrand. In March 1908 Howard Pim was elected chairman, and David Pollock secretary; the Society met on the premises of one of its members, a baker J.W. Quinn.²⁹ The colonial establishment in the Transvaal tended to avoid the body; the High Anglican bishop of Pretoria, Michael Furse, dropped out of it while the governor of the Transvaal, Lord Selborne, refused to become honorary president. At Pim's inaugural address as president, only sixty people were present.³⁰

Despite its tiny size, the Transvaal Native Affairs Society was a significant catalyst of ideas on racial segregation, which had up until that time been debated in more elite circles of missionaries or groups of colonial administrators such as the Fortnightly Club founded by members of the Milner Kindergarten.³¹ The Society was notable for discussing ideas on industrial education strongly influenced by the experiments of Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee in Alabama.³² In the course of 1909, however, a split emerged between moderates and hard-liners led by an insurance broker named F.W. Bell. The Bell faction secured the support of a British anthropologist visiting South Africa, A.H. Keane, author of a number of anthropological works and a former vice president of the Royal Anthropological Institute. Keane was drawn to the South African debate as a virulent racist who dismissed Africans as of low intellectual capacity. A figure from the Victorian anthropological tradition, he had become marginalized from British anthropology by the early twentieth century through his refusal to

²⁷A. Colquhoun, *The Afrikaner Land* (London, 1906).

²⁸J. Howard Pim Papers, Transvaal Native Affairs Society, *Constitution and Rules*, Johannesburg, 1908, para. 1.

²⁹J. Howard Pim Papers, Transvaal Native Affairs Society, Minute Book.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹Legassick, "British Hegemony."

³²*Transvaal Leader*, November 4 1908 and July 8 1909

accept the general enthusiasm for anthropometric measurement of skulls in preference for discovering racial differences through the study of language.³³

Keane addressed the Transvaal Native Affairs Society in September 1909 and declared that Africans had "ceased to evolve" and were "incapable of development." He cited the work of the U.S. racist R.W. Shufeld, a physician from Virginia, whose work *The Negro: A Menace to Civilization* had become popular among Southern segregationists.³⁴ Such "scientific" support was welcome to the Bell faction, who were dismissive of Pim's humanitarianism and support for a trusteeship role for whites in the sub-continent.³⁵ Bell succeeded Pim as president in 1909 and in a series of pamphlets urged a program of radical segregation that would make the Africans "like fish out of water" in the urban areas. He strongly attacked the evolutionary arguments of Lord Selborne on the grounds that they would lead to the disappearance of the white race in South Africa.³⁶

This emergence of racial extremism on the Witwatersrand occurred at a time when there was little formal anthropological research in South Africa. In Britain, some "Africa experts" such as Harry Johnstone urged that there should be far more interest in investigating the nature of African societies in South Africa.³⁷ This was a view that was echoed by Howard Pim in his retiring address as president of the Transvaal Native Affairs Society when he claimed that the "most obvious want of data sufficiently well established" made it hard to "justify our founding upon them a rational policy towards the native races of this country."³⁸ By the time of Union in 1910 segregation was still viewed by a number of observers as a rather dangerous experiment that had little sound scientific or empirical base on which to ground rational government policies.

Segregation, furthermore, appeared to be a strategy that contained the implicit danger of cutting South Africa from the ethical basis of statecraft that was generally considered to underlie the government in Britain. To some of Bell's supporters such as H.J. Crocker, this was not considered an especially serious problem. Restating the Darwinian view that the "ascendancy" of Western peoples was "physical and intellectual" rather than "moral and spiritual," Crocker argued that white rule in South Africa depended upon "some important modification of the ethical system upon which it is founded."³⁹ Other writers and opinion-formers

³³ A.H. Haddon Papers, Cambridge University Library, 4071, A.H. Keane to A.C. Haddon 27 January 1903; A.H. Keane, *Ethnology* (Cambridge, 1896), 10.

³⁴ *Transvaal Leader*, September 29 1909.

³⁵ Howard Pim, *The Native Problem: Presidential Address Read at the Inaugural Meeting of the Native Affairs Society, April 21, 1908* (Johannesburg, 1908), 1.

³⁶ Fred W. Bell, *The South African Native Problem: The Solution of Segregation* (Johannesburg, 1909), 13. Bell later reflected that the Native Affairs Society had come close to "being captured by those who may, I think, with reason be claimed as 'negrophilists,'" F.W. Bell Papers, Church of the Province Archives, University of the Witwatersrand, handwritten ms, n.d.

³⁷ Harry Johnstone, "The Native Problem and Sane Imperialism," *The Nineteenth Century* (August 1909), 234-44.

³⁸ Howard Pim, *A Plea For The Scientific Study of the Races Inhabiting South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1910).

³⁹ H.J. Crocker, *The South African Race Problem* (Johannesburg, 1908).

at this time took a different view and were anxious for South African policy to rest upon a more universal ethical basis. "Self-preservation," wrote Edward Dallas in 1909, was "not a matter of mere military dominance," for "the preservation of our moral status is as important. We hold almost as clear as life itself the mode of civilisation which is the expression of our national development—the organisation of social and public life in which the ideals of the race have found embodiment."⁴⁰ This anxiety found expression in some political speeches at the time, and in 1909 General Smuts warned an audience at Troyeville in Johannesburg that "if they wanted to push the ideal of segregation further they must be prepared for the gravest trouble that South Africa had faced in the course of its whole history."⁴¹

In the period after Union there seemed to be an increasingly favorable climate for segregationists to impress their ideas on political decision-makers. "Instinctively I feel the native problem cannot be longer shelved," Bell wrote to General J.B.M. Hertzog, the Union minister of native affairs in 1911, "if you tackle the problem you will need all the help possible from those whose heart is fired."⁴² Segregationist ideology began slowly to permeate the administrative echelons of government, though it is clear that sections of the Native Affairs Department, especially from the Cape and Transkei, remained hostile to it for a considerable number of years. The Cape Native Affairs Department was particularly suspicious of the extensive resettlement of the African population that would be required if segregation were to be successfully implemented. This was felt likely to lead to disruption and the erosion of the more paternalistic structures of control which the Department has been able to build up through its system of native magistrates.⁴³

Hertzog's espousal of segregationist ideas also alarmed a number of Cape politicians, such as John X. Merriman, who considered that "if it means trying to bottle the Natives up body and soul then we may as well pack up our portmantaux, for the European race will perish."⁴⁴ The appeal of segregation to many white opinion-formers and political leaders lay in its apparent ability to guarantee the whites a place in a future South Africa. Even though Bell was driven to confess that South Africa could never be a complete "white man's country," he still felt sure that "certain large areas may be preserved for each race once the desirability and the principle of segregation be recognised."⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Edward Dallas, *Notes on the South African Race Problem* (Johannesburg, 1909), 1. See also Trevor Fletcher, "The Native Problem: A Transcendental View," *The African Monthly*, 4, 24 (November 1908), 585.

⁴¹ *The Star*, July 15 1910.

⁴² F.W. Bell Papers, F.W. Bell to J.B.M. Hertzog, 26 September 1911.

⁴³ See, for example, the evidence of Edward Dower, Secretary of Native Affairs, to the Beaumont Commission, *Report of the Natives Lands Commission, Vol. 11, UG22-1916*, 230; Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, 80.

⁴⁴ John X. Merriman to M.T. Steyn, October 18 1912 in Phyllis Lewsen, ed., *Selections from the Correspondence of John X. Merriman* (Cape Town, 1966), 225.

⁴⁵ F.W. Bell Papers, F.W. Bell, *Farewell Address to the Transvaal Native Affairs Society* (Johannesburg, 1910).

The problem lay in being able to demonstrate the scientific validity of the segregationist idea to an audience that remained doubtful about both its morality and practicability. To a section of the South African professional class that was emerging at this time, the best way to justify it lay in the area of scientific evidence proving the essential differences of whites and blacks. Attention began to turn to the sociological and psychological aspects in which Africans were adjusting to the challenges of urbanization and industrialization in South Africa.

The Measurement of African Personality

In the years after Union, segregation in South Africa gained a number of adherents among the small South African professional intelligentsia as it took on a form that appeared politically feasible and morally acceptable, despite the doubts of earlier critics. In Natal, Maurice Evans became a popular exponent of the segregationist ideal. Addressing the Durban Native Affairs Reform Club in 1912, for instance, he drew on parallels with the U.S. South following a visit there the previous year. Like Pim, he was concerned with maintaining the cohesion of African peasant society in the face of advancing industrialization and was skeptical on the long-term prospects of an African urban population being able to survive. The point was to "protect, advise, assist, control, study to give the black man in our midst, not an individual opportunity but a racial opportunity."⁴⁶ Racial differences were a basic reality of South African life for Evans. Despite his acknowledgment that "zoologically we are of the same species," he exhibited a strain of neo-Lamarckian thought when he emphasized that races were different through the inheritance of acquired characteristics:

through countless generations we have diverged, and the physical differences which are so plain to us are the outward and visible signs of mental and spiritual differences, and . . . no change or treatment and environment will within any time available to us, make the black man's mind and spirit, any more than a black man's body that of a white man.⁴⁷

It appeared increasingly necessary to undertake some form of scientific measurement of what these supposed inherited differences really were. Evans's books *Black and White in South East Africa* (1911) and *Black and White in the Southern States* (1913) indicated the growing importance of American ideas on industrial training and the rustication of black peasant communities on South African race thinking.⁴⁸ This was to be taken a step further when some analysts began to approach the question of intelligence testing. By the First World War there was a growing popularity of biological and psychological theories of heredity in the British and U.S. scientific communities. Craniological and anthropometric mea-

⁴⁶Maurice Evans, *Studies in the Southern States from a South African point of view*, Address to the Durban Native Affairs Reform Committee (Durban, 1912?), 10.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸Paul B. Rich, "The Appeals of Tuskegee: James Henderson, Lovedale and the Fortunes of South African Liberalism, 1906-1930," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 20. 2 (1987), 271-92.

surements appeared increasingly unreliable indices of race differences, and analysts were drawn to intelligence tests as a more accurate way of assessing the educational potential of different racial and ethnic groups. The tests, as Stephen Jay Gould has pointed out, were generally based upon the fallacy that the percentage variation of individuals with each group could also explain differences between groups, especially whites and blacks.⁴⁹

The scientific community in South Africa, though small, was quick to respond to these methodological developments. The South African Association for the Advancement of Science (S.A.A.S.), which had been founded in 1903, exhibited a continuing interest in the ideas and approaches of the scientific communities in Britain and the U.S., from where a number of its members were recruited. The meetings of the S.A.A.S. also had a strong symbolic importance since they demonstrated in a tangible form the inclusion of the new Dominion of South Africa in the British Empire-Commonwealth. Membership of the Association grew from 547 in 1915 to 770 in 1939, indicating the slow professionalization of science teaching in schools and universities. The Association's meetings acted as an important forum for a variety of groups, which included a number of missionaries and educationalists as well as civil servants in the early years. The Association enjoyed a fairly close relationship with the South African state, aided by the personal interests during the inter-war years of a number of prominent politicians such as General Smuts and Jan H. Hofmeyr.⁵⁰

The Association's proceedings from the First World War included a Section F on social and anthropological issues, and these became dominated by the capacity of Africans to "adapt" and "evolve" towards the standards of "western civilisation." The participants in these proceedings usually avoided the earlier forms of anthropometric measurement and moved rapidly towards intelligence tests modelled on those developed by Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon in France and Henry H. Goddard, Lewis A. Terman, and R.M. Yerkes in the United States. Stephen Gottheid Rich, though, confessed to severe doubts in 1917 as to the applicability of the tests to Africans following a test conducted on 170 African children and students between 6 and 22 years of age at the Amanzimtoti and Adams Primary Schools in Natal. The Binet-Simon tests seemed to "test as much cultural conditions as of mental ability" and there were problems in establishing what was "normal progress" among Africans. Mission-educated Africans were not necessarily "typical" either, and the problem remained of establishing a valid test to assess the kind of educational curriculum that would "fit" Africans.⁵¹

The same year as this presentation, there appeared a book by an educationalist from Natal, Charles Templeman Loram, entitled *The Education of the*

⁴⁹Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (Harmondsworth, 1984), 146-233.

⁵⁰Jan H. Hofmeyr, for example, declared when opening the 1929 meeting of the Association that the emergence of South African science could serve as a "Southern gateway . . . effectively to permeate Africa," Jan H. Hofmeyr, *Africa and Science* (Cape Town, 1929), 11.

⁵¹Stephen Gottheid Rich, "Binet Simon Tests in Zululand," *Report of the S.A.A.S.*, Stellenbosch 1917 (Cape Town, 1918), 482. For the importance of the First World War on the U.S. tests, see Daniel J. Kevles, "Testing the Army's Intelligence: Psychologists and the Military in World War I," *The Journal of American History*, LV (June 1968), 556-81; Franz Samuelson, "World War I Intelligence Testing and the Development of Psychology," *Journal of the History of Behavioural Science*, 13 (1977), 274-82.

South African Native. This work was to have a marked impact on the debate on African educability for a considerable number of years. Loram was interested in the subject of "racial psychology," and the book was originally a doctoral dissertation submitted to the Teachers' College at Columbia University where intelligence testing had been developed through the work of Edward Lee Thorndike.⁵²

Loram was a strong advocate of segregation at the time of writing the book, for he felt that the education of Africans should be geared towards industrial and agricultural rather than "literary and bookish" training.⁵³ He attacked what he saw as the "assimilationist" principles of the Cape system and stressed the differential patterns of mental development of whites and blacks on the basis of comparative tests of schoolchildren. In the case of arithmetic, for instance, he reported that African children were 30 to 100 percent slower than white children and less accurate. The "slowness" of Africans was, he claimed, "proverbial" and "until we realise that our educational programme must be based upon the peculiar characteristics of the people we are doomed to disappointment."⁵⁴

Loram doubted whether these "peculiar characteristics" were rooted in a firm pattern of "arrested development," since a eugenic program involving "the spread of civilisation, selective breeding, improved environment, and better teaching" would in time "lessen the mental differences between Europeans and Natives."⁵⁵ The work blurred the distinction between heredity and environment and urged that both biological and social engineering were needed in South African "race relations" as it was being increasingly termed.⁵⁶

The discussions in the S.A.A.A.S. reflected this growing interest in the importance of both heredity and environment in the years after World War One. This was a period in which there was mounting anxiety in white political circles over the possible threat to white racial purity through sexual "miscegenation" with black Africans. Sarah Gertrude Millin's novels of this period such as *Dark Water* (1921) and *God's Stepchildren* (1924) exemplify this preoccupation with interracial sexual liaisons and the emergence of a supposedly degenerate "half-caste" progeny.⁵⁷ In 1927 the Immorality Act, outlawing sexual relationships across the color line, was passed by the South African Parliament.

⁵²*The Education of the South African Native*, 127.

⁵³For the significance of Thorndike's work at the Columbia Teacher's College see Hamilton Cravens, *The Triumph of Evolution: American Scientists and the Heredity-Environment Controversy, 1900-1941* (Philadelphia, 1978), 15-86.

⁵⁴Loram, *Education*, 192.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 224-25.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷J.M. Coetzee, "Blood, Flaw, Taint, Degeneration: The Case of Sarah Gertrude Millin," *English Studies in Africa*, 23, 1 (1980), 41-59. The attack on "miscegenation" occurred in scientific circles at this time as well. At the 1917 meeting of the S.A.A.A.S. Rev Noel Roberts argued that there was a distinct "native mentality," which missions had to train in the art of reasoning. This "mentality" was based upon the "arrested development" of African children, whose "early promise" was checked by a wave of "sexualism" which in many cases took "entire possession of their natures to the exclusion of every other desire." The 1913 *Report of the Commission To Inquire into Assaults on Women* was cited in support of this assertion. N. Roberts, "Native Education From an Economic Point of View," *Report To The S.A.A.A.S.* (Cape Town, 1918), 99.

In academic circles, there was a similar interest in issues of heredity. The same year as Loram's book was published, H.B. Fantham took up the post of the first professor of comparative anatomy at the newly established University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Fantham brought considerable prestige to the post, having graduated from Cambridge (Christ's College) and University College, London, where he had been a gold medalist in zoology and a Derby research scholar. A passionate eugenicist, Fantham established a school of research at Wits and served on the university's senate, as well as being dean of the science faculty. In a number of public lectures he urged the need for sociologists to become "thoroughly versed in biological science" and outlined the basic precepts of eugenics and race fitness in terms of a Darwinian pattern of evolutionary development.⁵⁸

Fantham was dismissive of Lamarckian ideas on the inheritance of acquired characteristics. In contrast to the rather more open-ended approach of such figures as Evans and Loram, he emphasized the notion of an ineradicable heredity. This was based upon the germ plasm theory of the German scientist August Weismann, who claimed that human heredity was shaped by an ineradicable "germ plasm" inherited from the earliest beginnings of *homo sapiens*. The influence of heredity was, Fantham claimed, "ineradicable, certain and immediate." This meant that in the study of human sociology "sentiment must be curbed or kept in bounds in accordance with scientific knowledge," since the goal of human improvement could only work in the context of a more basic set of hereditarian limits. Fantham warned of a general rise in the black birth rate and supported the banning of inter-racial marriages and sexual contact. The mentally unfit should also be sterilized. Such policies were necessary as part of a campaign for what Fantham termed a "eugenic conscience" in South Africa and he became active in establishing a series of committees on genetics and eugenics in the S.A.A.A.S.⁵⁹

Fantham's emphasis on the centrality of heredity did not go unchallenged in S.A.A.A.S. circles. In a paper at the 1926 meeting of the Association, the professor of zoology at Rhodes University in the Eastern Cape, J.E. Duerden, attacked the "force" of heredity and the idea that "the germ plasm contains within itself something which must necessarily express itself in a certain fashion in the completed body." Duerden accepted that there were limits on the extent to which heredity could be malleable. In the case of experiments on improving the quality of ostrich feathers in South Africa, for instance, it was found that "with all our selection of germ plasm in the ostrich, interacting with the best of feeding and management, we have never been able to produce a plume beyond a certain

⁵⁸H.B. Fantham File, Church of the Province Archives, University of the Witwatersrand, H.B. Fantham, lecture "Evolution and Mankind" delivered to the School of Mines, Johannesburg, July 9 1918.

⁵⁹H.B. Fantham, "Heredity in Man: Its Importance Both Biologically and Educationally," *South African Journal of Science*, XX1 (1924), 498-527; "Some Factors in Eugenics, Together With Notes on Some South African Cases," *South African Journal of Science*, XX11 (1925), 400-212; "Some Thoughts on the Social Aspects of Eugenics, with notes on some further cases of human inheritance observed in South Africa," *South African Journal of Science*, XX111 (1926), 624-43; "Some Thoughts on Biology and Race," *South African Journal of Science*, XX1V (1927), 1-20.

length, or a certain width, or a certain lustre and grace of form."⁶⁰ The critics of the extreme hereditarian argument tended to work within the basic assumptions of the germ plasm theory, though Durden doubted the contemporary stress on the "rising tide of colour" as it had been described in the United States and Britain in the writings of Lothrop Stoddard and Putnam Weale. Durden emphasized the importance of "Bantu studies" in the training of "experts," for in South Africa the "problem" was "no longer racial in the strict sense, not between white and black, but industrial and economic, though with peculiar features compared with other countries."⁶¹

Duerden's attack on the hereditarians reflected a growing realization in some quarters of the S.A.A.A.S that if the organization were to have any impact politically, it had to be geared to current debate on policy, especially in the areas of rescue work for "poor whites" and African educability. The Association had been considerably marginalized during the 1920s by the emergence of rival bodies formed to discuss and formulate policy on "the native question." In particular the Native Affairs Commission was established in 1920 as a result of the Native Affairs Act, and during the early 1920s succeeded in creating a significant role for itself in debate on racial issues. Loram became a prominent member of the Commission and at the 1921 meeting of the S.A.A.A.S. urged greater support for "experts" on the "native question," including political scientists, economists, psychologists and sociologists.⁶²

In the course of the 1920s a number of liberals began to question the hereditarian orthodoxies of the eugenicists. One work that was especially important in this counter-attack was the book written by a former Rhodesian magistrate, Peter Nielsen, entitled *The Black Man's Place in South Africa*, published in 1922. This was critical of the craniological classification of races and debunked the mythology of skull measurements that was still finding support in some S.A.A.A.S. papers at this time.⁶³ Nielsen also attacked the notion of "arrested development" at puberty among Africans as being "another popular notion for which a sort of pseudo scientific authority may be quoted from encyclopaedias and old books of travel."⁶⁴ The work went on to dismiss the idea that there was a distinct "native mind" intrinsically different from that of whites and the Lamarckian concept that there could be inheritance of acquired characteristics.⁶⁵ Nielsen was in many respects one of the most important early South African

⁶⁰J.E. Duerden, "Genetics and Eugenics in South Africa: Heredity and Environment," *South African Journal of Science*, XXII (1925), 63.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 69.

⁶²C.T. Loram, "The Claims of the Native Question Upon Scientists," Presidential Address to Section E, S.A.A.A.S., 1921, *Proceedings of the S.A.A.A.S.* (Cape Town, 1921), 100.

⁶³The Cape liberal and amateur astronomer Alex Roberts, for example, claimed in 1922 that with the spread of education African physical features were changing "and in this direction it is interesting to state that the shape of the head of the outstanding Native leaders is quite different from that of the ordinary kraal native." A.W. Roberts, "Certain Aspects of the Native Question," *Report of the 20th Meeting of the S.A.A.A.S.* (Maputo, 1922), 98; *The Star*, July 15 1922; *The Cape Argus*, June 30 1922.

⁶⁴Peter Nielsen, *The Black Man's Place in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1922), 10.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 20-35.

critics of the whole gamut of images and popular mythologies inherited from the phase of European colonization of the African continent. He rejected the Darwinian assumption that human ethics were subordinate to the imperatives of natural selection and emphasized the importance of human intelligence in transcending the laws of biological struggle. White "superiority" was not based upon longer exposure to education, for "now that Western civilisation is spreading over the land the difference in the moral outlook of the two peoples tends to decrease; ... and soon there will be no difference at all."⁶⁶

Nielsen's book can be seen as representing a landmark within the local South African debate over the nature and direction of supposed racial differences. While many of its arguments were already becoming familiar at this time in liberal circles in Britain and the U.S., it was a significant local rejection of many of the basic assumptions of "diversificationism" implicit within most race thinking in South Africa. The book had an appeal to some of predominantly English-speaking liberals organized around the Joint Council movement in South Africa in the 1920s, especially as it undermined the idea that there was a distinct African "mind," which could be explored through various forms of "scientific" intelligence testing. One of the organizers of the Joint Council movement, J.D. Rheinallt Jones, went on to reject the idea of an "primitive mentality" rooted in the theories of the French anthropologist Levy Bruhl in an S.A.A.S paper in 1926.⁶⁷

This did not prevent some of the liberals from becoming involved in various efforts at intelligence testing, especially those concerning the attainments of "poor white" children. The professor of philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, R.F.A. Hoernle, conducted such a test in 1926 on behalf of the Transvaal Education Department, though his conclusions were bitterly attacked in the Afrikaner nationalist paper *Die Burger* for alleged bias.⁶⁸ Hoernle acknowledged that the results were "experimental and provisional" in nature, though he did some lecturing on the tests to the YMCA in Johannesburg as well as the East Rand Teachers Association.⁶⁹ There was a considerable fund of interest in intelligence testing at this time among both welfare and educational circles in South Africa as they were seen as representing a "scientific" approach to the question of tackling the "poor white" issue. Hoernle was keen to mobilize more extensive academic support from colleagues such as the educationalist E.G. Malherbe teaching in the Department of Education at the University of Cape Town.

Intelligence tests also began to be examined with some interest in government circles in the course of the 1920s as a means of gathering evidence to tackle the "poor white" issue. Differences between different groups of white children were usually interpreted in terms of environmental differences, while those between whites and blacks were perceived in terms of heredity. In 1923 the

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 57.

⁶⁷J.D. Rheinallt Jones, "The Need for a Scientific Basis for South African Native Policy," *South African Journal of Science*, XXIII (1923).

⁶⁸E.G. Malherbe Papers, Killie Campbell Library, Durban, 425/1, R.F.A. Hoernle to E.G.M. 20 and 24 March 1926.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, R.F.A.H. to E.G.M. 25 March 1926.

commissioner for mental disorders, J.T. Dunstan, delivered the presidential address to Section F of the S.A.A.S. and made a comparison between "retarded" and "defective" white children. In comparison to the good prospects of educating the "retarded" white children, there was, Dunstan claimed, "such a deficiency of brain cells" among Africans that "neither education, nor environment, nor any other factor except a mutation, can lead to their rising to the level of advancement of the higher races."⁷⁰ This interest in intelligence testing continued throughout the 1920s, and in 1928 the psychologist I.D. MacCrone published some early research in social psychology (which he later disclaimed) examining the comparative scores of African girls in Rosettenville, Johannesburg, and those of London school children collected by the educationalist Cyril Burt. He concluded that there was an apparent peak in the average level of performance around 11-12 years for the African children and 13-14 years for the white children. This appeared to demonstrate the phenomenon of "arrested development."⁷¹

By the late 1920s, there were pressures to put this kind of research onto a more organized footing, especially with the onset of the Depression and the growing political importance of "poor white" issues in South African politics. In 1929, E.G. Malherbe was appointed director of the newly established National Bureau for Education and Social Research. Malherbe had been strongly influenced in his early approach to educational issues by C.T. Loram, who pressed him to go into a similar field as himself on "race relations."⁷² Like Loram, Malherbe had studied at Columbia Teachers' College, where he kept close links with its academic teaching staff. However, a period of teaching in the newly formed Department of Education under the British educationalist Fred Clark at the University of Cape Town in the early 1920s had impressed on him the need to avoid areas of too great political controversy.⁷³ Loram himself had fallen out of favor with the Union minister of native affairs E.G. Jansen in the late 1920s and was forced to resign from the Native Affairs Commission in 1929. The following year he opted out of South African issues in a state of some bitterness and took a post as professor of race relations at Yale University.

Malherbe was determined not to fall into the same trap as Loram. In a paper to the S.A.A.S. he focussed upon the economic dimensions of the "poor white" issue, which he saw, on the basis of W.M. Macmillan's 1919 study, *The South African Agrarian Problem*, as one of transition from an agrarian to an industrial society. He condemned the "colour bar" as a barrier that checked the "natural growth of the native." Malherbe broadly supported the aims of industrial educa-

⁷⁰J.T. Dunstan, "Retarded and Defective Children: Native Mentality: Mental Testing," *Report of the S.A.A.S.* (Bloemfontein, 1923), 155.

⁷¹I.D. MacCrone, "Preliminary Results from the Porteus Maize Tests Applied to Native School Children," *South African Journal of Science*, XXV (1928), 481-84.

⁷²E.G. Malherbe Papers, Killie Campbell Library, Durban, 619, C.T. Loram to E.G. Malherbe, 3 and 29 November 1928. By the following year Loram wrote despondently that there did not appear to be anyone else for the N.A.C.: "brought up in our traditions," 4 March 1929

⁷³E.G. Malherbe Papers, MSS 606, Fred Clarke to E.G.M., February 26 1925. "Sometimes silence is the only possible form of support," Clarke wrote to Malherbe, "once you have given a clear statement of your own position."

tion for Africans.⁷⁴ During the following decade he began to direct the research of the National Bureau towards what he perceived to be the policy needs of the government and tried to influence official thinking towards alleviating the hardship of poor white families and breaking a cycle of pathology that was believed, on the pattern of the Jukes and Kallikak families in the United States, to run through several generations.⁷⁵ Malherbe was also keen to establish links with the mainstream white liberal establishment organized after 1929 around the South African Institute of Race Relations.⁷⁶

The National Bureau tried to act as a forum for debate on African education and provided the base for further intelligence testing by the psychologist of the Department of the Interior, M.L. Fick. This had involved the testing of individuals through the model of the Simon-Binet Tests and group tests modelled on the Army Beta Test devised by R.M. Yerkes in the U.S. during the First World War. The findings of Fick's study were based on 10,000 white, 817 Coloured, 762 Indian, and 293 African children. Fick challenged Loram's findings in his 1915-16 study by arguing that the scores showed significantly different levels of ability between white and African children. Even the mission-educated African children, he declared, did not grow up with pictures or diagrams and he suggested that African children "may have a different type of intelligence." In general there appeared to be "a complete lack of power of working as a group" among the African children, though the school teaching methods were found to be based on learning by rote, such that "when the child is faced with a novel situation that requires some initiative or independent activity, as in the intelligence test, it is confused and at a loss."⁷⁷ The "poor white" children, on the other hand, were tested on government-funded "indigent settlements." Two farms were tested before and after the introduction of a feeding scheme lasting a period of eighteen months. Though there were no significant increase in intelligence levels, "greater alertness and application" were noted in the school children and it was suggested that if the results were "corroborated by a longer period of feeding and stricter control, they hold out great possibilities for overcoming the apathy, lack of application and of initiative—qualities which appear to be the greatest obstacles in rehabilitating the majority of the poor whites."⁷⁸

The impact of the research on intelligence testing on government educational policy in the 1930s appears, however, to have been limited. The research that Fick initially reported on at the 1929 meeting of the S.A.A.S. became

⁷⁴E.G. Malherbe, "Education and the Poor White," *South African Journal of Science*, XXV1 (1929), 883-903.

⁷⁵The Kallikak and Jukes family studies in the United States were recognized by a number of prominent South African psychologists at this time. See, for example, R.W. Wilcocks, "Intelligence, Environment and Heredity," *South African Journal of Science*, XXV11 (November 1931), 63-76. For the nature of the studies and their eventual rebuttal see Cravens, *The Triumph of Evolution*.

⁷⁶E.G. Malherbe, *Never a Dull Moment* (Cape Town, 1981), 181. For the work of the S.A.I.R.R., see Paul B. Rich, *White Power and the Liberal Conscience* (Manchester, 1986).

⁷⁷M.L. Fick, "Intelligence Test Results of Poor White, Native (Zulu), Coloured and Indian School Children and the Educational and Social Implications," *South African Journal of Science*, XXV1 (1929), 910.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 913.

rather marginalized by the debate surrounding the report of the Native Economic Commission in 1932, which advocated the "adaptation" of African societies in the reserves towards those of white settler society in South Africa. This was represented as a middle course between the Cape ideal of assimilationism on the one hand and "repression" on the other. While segregationist in its acceptance of the idea of separate African land ownership in South Africa, it was nevertheless concerned with seeking to persuade and convince African political leadership of the just nature of the segregationist program.⁷⁹ It would be difficult to do this if it were seen as resting upon the premise that Africans were permanently inferior in their capacity for education compared to whites.

The role of black opinion in the issue of African educability became an additional important element in debate in the 1930s. An informed class of black opinion leaders had emerged in South Africa by the 1920s, whose political views became sharpened by the trajectory of segregation policy. In the Cape, for instance, D.D.T. Jabavu at the University College of Fort Hare was a strong exponent of Cape liberal ideals and a passionate defender of the color-blind franchise threatened by the legislation proposed by the Pact Government of J.B.M. Hertzog. In 1929 he challenged Fick's assertions concerning African mental inferiority at the S.A.A.S. meeting, maintaining that the differences were culturally induced. Jabavu backed up this assertion by pointing out that over the previous twenty years some 60 black South Africans had obtained higher degrees outside the country, while at the University College of Fort Hare a further 77 had passed the university matriculation, and 10 had graduated in the University of South Africa.⁸⁰

The development of an articulate black intellectual opposition to the claims of the hereditarians helped buttress the opposition of the white liberal establishment to the continuing trajectory of segregation in South Africa. Jabavu became a member of the Committee of the South African Institute of Race Relations and during the 1930s many white liberals established much closer connections with members of the black political and educational elite. This black liberal opposition represented a generation of what Shingler has termed African educational modernizers who avoided nationalist ideals in favor of remodelling African society around norms of Christianity and industry and the creation of a black assimilationist elite.⁸¹ Not all black leadership in South Africa accepted such goals, and the members of the Gamma Sigma Club, organized on the Witwatersrand by the American Board missionary Ray Phillips in the early 1930s, enthusiastically supported ideals of racial segregation.⁸² The black input into the education debate proved important for the emerging group of white liberal critics of segregation in the early 1930s anxious to shift the debate away from race towards cultural attributes. Black leaders and intellectuals, however, remained

⁷⁹The black newspaper *Ilanga Lase Natal*, though, wondered whether the concept of "adaptation" was not simply "repression" in another guise. *Ilanga Lase Natal* September 9 1932.

⁸⁰D.D.T. Jabavu, "Higher Education and the Professional Training of the Bantu," *South African Journal of Science*, XXV1 (1929), 934-5.

⁸¹Shingler, "Education and Political Order," 29.

⁸²Minute Book of the Gamma Sigma Club, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 20 March 1931; *The Star*, 18 April 1931. R.F.A. Hoernle was in the chair.

junior partners of the white liberals in this enterprise in the 1930s. Z.K. Matthews, a colleague of Jabavu's who taught anthropology at Fort Hare, hoped to establish discussion groups of black leaders which could debate such issues in a manner similar to the S.A.A.A.S. But such a scheme failed to get off the ground in the pre-war period and black leadership generally remained beholden to the white liberal establishment.⁸³

New Departures

By 1930 a number of white South African liberals such as Edgar Brooks, James Henderson, and R.F.A. Hoernle had visited the United States and observed the progress of U.S. blacks in comparison to black South Africans.⁸⁴ To some of this group, the older ideals of segregation were found increasingly wanting in that they failed to allow for the creation of a Westernized urban black elite that could be incorporated into a common industrial society. Many liberals saw themselves as cultural intermediaries between what they termed "western civilisation" and a proletarianizing black African society.⁸⁵ They had a significant influence in the evolving political debate on black education in South Africa in the 1930s. The Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Native Education in 1935, for example, was notable for avoiding any supposedly "scientific" evidence of inferior African educability. It opposed the idea that education should be aimed at keeping Africans in segregated reserves.⁸⁶ It was impressed by the evidence of a number of witnesses, including Edgar Brookes, that there was no difference philosophically in the ultimate aim of education but only of "method" since "the education of the White child prepares him for life in a dominant society and the education of a Black child for a subordinate society."⁸⁷ Official ideology in South Africa by the 1930s was thus prepared to fall back on justifying the present social order through the previous historical legacy of colonial conquest than resorting to an argument for permanent black racial inferiority. This also related to its interest in gearing education to a changing economic pattern in which growing numbers of Africans were envisaged as leaving the reserve economies and coming into "contact with European economic life."⁸⁸

Such a policy entailed the emergence of a more skilled or semi-skilled African work force, though there was also a continuing emphasis upon the need to maintain social cohesion. A number of new theoretical approaches began to be developed from both psychology and social anthropology to reinforce this shift away from race towards a cultural analysis of South African political and economic divisions. The ideas of the social anthropology school of Malinowski in Britain as well as U. S. anthropologists such as Franz Boas began to permeate the

⁸³Z.K. Matthews Papers, microfilm, University of the Witwatersrand, Z.K. Matthews to Tennyson Makiwane, 18 September 1936.

⁸⁴See for example Rich, "The Appeals of Tuskegee."

⁸⁵Edgar Brookes, *Native Education in South Africa* (Pretoria, 1930), 15.

⁸⁶*Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Native Education, 1935-36*, U.G.29-1936, 86.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 87.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 89.

thinking of South African liberal discourse in the wake of the 1932 Native Economic Commission Report. The school of social anthropology rejected supposedly "scientific" determinants of racial difference in favor of a social model rooted in concepts of cultural change. Winifred Hoernle, the wife of R.F.A. Hoernle, and who taught anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand, ardently defended this view in a presidential address to Section E of the S.A.A.A.S. in its 1933 meeting. In the process, she shifted the emphasis away from the historical study of African cultures towards an inductive study of their functioning components. She described social anthropology as emerging as a discipline that was no longer simply concerned with "lower cultures" but with more general issues of "culture contact," as African societies began a process of social transition towards a Western-style industrial order. This approach was to have a considerable impact on anthropological research in both South Africa and Britain in the course of the 1930s.⁸⁹

In the case of psychology too there was a shift away from intelligence testing per se towards a wider study of inter-group relations. I.D. MacCrone stressed the need in 1932 for social psychologists to reach agreement on the criteria for measuring both personality traits and social attitudes and to begin tackling the question of "inter-racial attitudes."⁹⁰ By the middle 1930s this approach began to have some impact on liberal attitudes towards "race relations" in South Africa. MacCrone felt that race differences as such were a "pseudo problem" and that what was far more important was a study of the group psychology that underlay racial cleavages of a perceptual kind. MacCrone drew upon North American studies that showed that supposed differences between school children in northern and southern states were due to selective migration. He felt compelled to agree with the American scholar Otto Klineberg that these differences would disappear as the black "environment" more nearly approximated that of whites. What was far more significant than any supposedly innate racial differences were group contacts and the way that group psychology was formed.⁹¹ MacCrone's ideas had an immediate impact on J.D. Rheinallt Jones, the director of the South African Institute of Race Relations, who reported to the annual S.A.I.R.R. meeting in Durban a series of tests on English and Afrikaner perceptions of each other in the South African context.⁹² MacCrone's work was vital for adding a psychological dimension to the "frontier thesis" in South African historical debate. His *Race Attitudes in South Africa* (1938) advanced the idea that contemporary racial aversion in South Africa was a product of racial attitudes generated in the pre-industrial frontier setting and which had survived into the era of industrialization.⁹³

⁸⁹ A.W. Hoernle, "New Aims and Methods in Social Anthropology," *South African Journal of Science*, XXX (October 1933), 74-92.

⁹⁰ I.D. MacCrone, "Psychology in Perspective" in *Our Changing World View* (Johannesburg, 1932), 16.

⁹¹ I.D. MacCrone, "The Problem of Race Differences," *South African Journal of Science*, XXXIII (1936), 92-107.

⁹² *The Natal Mercury*, 27 July 1936.

⁹³ I.D. MacCrone, *Race Attitudes in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1938).

This shift away from hereditary explanations for intelligence differences also became evident in the important 1934 conference organized by E.G. Malherbe entitled "Educational Adaptations in a Changing Society." Here R.F.A. Hoernle attacked Fick's conclusions on African educability on the grounds that there was no clear scientific evidence for a distinct African "race psychology" and that any differences were culturally induced. This might still nevertheless lead, Hoernle acknowledged, to conclusions similar to the segregationists in that "Europeanisation" of Africans might be opposed on the grounds that it threatened their cultural unity but it could not be based on any hereditarian evidence. Citing the work of Nielsen, Hoernle argued that it "would be a gain for the discussion to be switched from attempts to demonstrate the inherent congenital inferiority of the Bantu to an examination of their disabilities under White rule or of the positive values inherent in traditional Bantu culture."⁹⁴

The advocates of the unity of the human species ended up winning a limited victory in South African political debate in the 1930s. They were able to shift the intellectual ground towards a discussion of cultural rather than racial attributes in African educability. This shift was not immediately apparent in all areas of debate. The office of the psychologist of the South African government, Oswald Black, was keen in 1935 to initiate an investigation on mental development in children under the impression that both Loram and Fick's research showed that African intelligence was "arrested" at the age of 12 or 13.⁹⁵

The debate also proved to be open-ended on the question of whether or not segregation was justifiable in order to maintain the social cohesion of African society. Hoernle argued in 1935 that there were at least two different meanings attached to the notion of one's "own" culture: the sense in which that which was the Africans' own was intrinsically different from that of whites, and the sense in which "own" was what they could make their own. This implied that there would not necessarily be a simple "adaptation" to "European" cultural norms and that Africans would preserve a number of features of their "traditional" culture and folkways.⁹⁶ This provided some intellectual support for a variant of segregation, and Hoernle was specially notable for leaving open in his 1939 Phelps-Stokes lectures the question of whether "total segregation" was a desirable way to preserve the "liberal spirit" in South African politics.⁹⁷

The Afrikaner nationalist advocates of Christian national education also tended to avoid overtly "scientific" arguments of African inferior educability. In 1939, Dr. W.W.M. Eiselen, professor of volkekunde at the University of Stellenbosch and later secretary of native affairs under Dr. Verwoerd in the 1950s, wrote a non-committal forward to Fick's study *The Educability of the South African Native*. Grading based on intelligence tests could "hardly be accepted as reliable," Eiselen wrote, "unless it shows a distinct superiority in comparison with that based on

⁹⁴E.G. Malherbe, ed., *Educational Adaptations in a Changing Society* (Cape Town, 1937), 448.

⁹⁵J.D. Rheinalt Jones Papers, Church of the Province Archives, University of the Witwatersrand, AD843.B.93.4. O. Black to J.D. R-J, 26 March 1935.

⁹⁶R.F.A. Hoernle, "Can SA Natives Develop Along Their Own Lines?," *Journal of Secondary Education*, XIV, 69 (November 1935), 25.

⁹⁷R.F.A. Hoernle, *South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit* (Cape Town, 1939); *White Power and the Liberal Conscience*, 66-69.

Class achievement." Nevertheless, Fick's data did confirm for Eiselen that "the Native" was not "educable in precisely the same way as the European," though there was still a need for more data on the subject.⁹⁸

Concluding Comments

In the period up to the outbreak of World War Two there was an emerging consensus among both liberals and Afrikaner nationalist intellectuals on the centrality of culture rather than race in South African debate. There was a continuing difference of emphasis upon the degree of this cultural difference and the nature that state policy in South Africa should take to promote greater cultural uniformity between different racial groups. "Scientific" arguments of race difference had a diminishing impact on the nature of this debate and were to become further marginalized once the war itself had begun. The bogus claims of national socialism in Germany made scientific racism increasingly unacceptable intellectually. Malherbe wrote acerbically in his private notebook some time during World War Two of the embarrassing memory of some of the claims made at S.A.A.A.S. meetings. It was an "amazing spectacle," he felt, "that men of science will come together annually in solemn conclave and pass upon [condone] results of measurement inaccurate the like of which they wd never have tolerated in their own scientific work."⁹⁹ Such comments hinted at a more aggressive mood among many liberally inclined scholars and educationalists in the post-war years against the abuse of science in the name of racial ideology. This increasing disrespect amongst Afrikaner intellectuals like Malherbe for such "scientific" measuring contributed to the growing importance placed by the advocates of volkekunde on the cultural differences of "peoples" in the formulation of the apartheid doctrine by 1948.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸W. Eiselen, "Foreword," in M. Laurence Fick, *The Education of the South African Native* (Pretoria, 1939).

⁹⁹E.G. Malherbe Papers, 565, E.G.M. Notebook entry during World War II.

¹⁰⁰For the impact of Volkekunde on apartheid ideology see John Sharp, "The Roots and Development of Volkekunde in South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 8 (1981), 16-36; Adam Kuper, "Anthropology and Apartheid," in John Lonsdale, ed., *South Africa in Question* (London, 1988), 33-51.